

Dance Department History Project 2010-2011

Transcribed interview of Kathleen Sheffield on November 19, 2010

Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis

My name is Kathleen Sheffield and I have been at BYU since 1980. I came as a seventeen-year-old freshman, and I did my undergrad work and went on to do my master's in modern dance and educational leadership. I had a minor that had to do with curriculum instructional science.

I began teaching in the children's dance program in 1982 under the direction of Chris Allerton the artistic director, and Kathy Debenham as assistant or associate director. It is called the Young Dancemakers, which has about 100 to 120 children in it, who come about twice a week. The program itself was 280 to 300 students. The program began fifty-five years ago. This is my memory as prompted both by Sara Lee Gibb, our dean, and Christine Allerton, who was a past director.

Dean Hartvigsen who was Dean of Physical Education came to Sara Lee and asked her if she would be interested in spearheading some children's dance classes. Virginia Tanner had been teaching some classes at Wasatch School and there seemed to be some interest. Sara Lee took charge in what would be the beginning classes of what is now a flourishing program. From what I understand, there were classes just held on Friday in the Richards Building and it wasn't an extended time throughout the year as it is now.

Sara Lee directed and taught in that program for a number of years. When Christine Allerton came down to get her master's degree, she was hired first to teach in the program and later became director. It was under Christine that many changes happened in the program. The younger Dancemakers came and had flourishment and enrollment. Even at that time, they were teaching in church houses to get tuition down. With the tax-exempt status in the early 90's, we had to batten down the hatches and go out and rent space.

Our program right now has more students than it has ever had, and it has grown every year in the past ten years that I've directed. We now have 350 to 360 students, where the average was 250, or no more than 280 prior to that. We've grown to the seams, and we cannot take another student because we cannot open another class. This year we have a faculty of thirty-two and we have classes throughout the week. Some of those classes are young dance major classes that meet twice a week, so that would be double enrollment.

Some of those are single enrollment classes. We offer classes for children ages 3-18. Originally the program had them starting at age four, but there was a need and desire for there to be something creative for the three-year-old preschoolers to do. We have a pretty good following there. We do very limited publicity and our classes are full every semester. We've worked to keep tuition down and we are able to do that in some ways. We have a lab experience for those that take the methods class and elementary education majors can come in. We offer some performances of children's choreography: one performance winter semester and two in the fall semester. It's a way for elementary educators and method students to see students dancing what they created.

Because of that, we have been able to maintain time on Friday in the Richards Building, which has helped us with our budgets because it provides opportunity for students who don't have access to a car, since it is an on-campus place where they could come and observe. Now, our classes are Edgement Elementary, Provost Elementary, and the Women's Council Meeting building, which isn't really close

enough for students who don't have a vehicle during their education process at the university. It is a great blessing because we are able to have classes on campus, we are able to keep the education costs down, which I think is really important. We don't want it to be a program just for the financially elite in our community. We have students coming from Nephi who drive to take classes and we even have students from Sandy driving down in this direction. Many teachers that have been trained and taught in the children's program have gone out and opened a smaller program up in their own community. We do have some, not sister, but similar programs springing up in the Wasatch Front, which we don't see as competition, necessarily. Sometimes, we are after the same resources for facilities or teachers or faculty, but the more children who can have this great experience, we just applaud.

Kathy Debenham was an associate director with Chris and under her direction as well is when the Young Dancemakers came to be. That was the performing arm and that was when we started having concerts in the de Jong concert hall for the Young Dancemakers. We usually have a concert every year. It is generally the first week in May in the de Jong concert hall where right now it is 120 students who are members of the Young Dancemakers. The other 230 students are part of the program and they perform in three shows in May in the Richards Building. We call that the Sharing Showcase.

The de Jong performs evening of dance and the Richards Building performs Sharing Showcase. It is less of a formal production. The reason we have three shows, which are only about forty minutes each, is because we have enough parents that we couldn't seat all the family members, who would also need to sit through all the other children's dances. We have found by splitting it in three or four shows, it helps to make it a family event and other siblings can come and enjoy it. In the de Jong, we have a six-year-old minimum age requirement.

We would be in trouble if we couldn't use a large stage such as the de Jong because the classes have about 12 to 13 class members, and there's just not the space to do the choreography or the stage space to have 120 children come out for a finale. We have produced a new show every year. The pattern that was set was the repertory show, where they would repeat a show after every five years. I felt like part of the purpose of the program as we were reviewing the grounding principles was really to have the children be involved in the creative process. It can be difficult to have them be a part of the ingenuity and with their ideas. Now, we operate under a theme and the teachers have some autonomy (with Evening of Dance), to develop a dance based off the theme.

One of the themes we've done was games children play. Based on board games, I did a piece on yo-yos, another class did checkers and the boys did Stratego. It was a springboard idea where the children's ideas were incorporated. This year we are doing Cinemagic, which is a theme Ballroom did before and it is based on movie themes. As the director, I make the decision for what the theme is this year, but I try and watch what the children are creating, what their pieces are about, so when they have a theme, we can work with what they have got. There is such great music being composed for movies and so many dances based off that. That is where that idea came from. I kind of took the idea and pulled it together, but the theme really came from the children themselves. I've seen them do pieces about Mission Impossible, the Newsies, and some of the musicals. We'll see what happens this year, but it should be really fun.

I think it was 1997 that Kathy received a full-time position at UVU. She stayed around for a year, I think, and then I was brought in as associate or assistant director. One thing I meant to say when I got off track, is that there is a director for the program. Kathy was associate director for the Young Dancemakers. There is an artistic directorship and a program directorship, since we have that performing arm.

I guess my full title would be director of the program and artistic director of the Young Dancemakers. At the time that I put the program together, we were in the red a little bit. I came in as assistant director under Chris Allerton for both the Young Dancemakers and the program. Then, in 2002 when Chris retired from directing the program, it was about three weeks before our concert that year. I stepped in and that was my first year of setting up the classes. I directed that concert and then stepped in to direct the program. This will be my eleventh concert this year, but my tenth full year directing the program and the Young Dancemakers.

Boy's classes in the program: When the boys are three, we bring them in to the girl's section and try to group them in the same sections, so they might have a buddy. When they get to be five, we have a separate class where many of the five- to seven-year-old children work together and then if we have enough, we do eight- to ten-year-old boys and then eleven to fourteen. Very often as boys grow up in their enrollment, they get involved in athletic kinds of things, even karate, etc. Our enrollment is lower, but we work to try and have that be part of the program.

Their needs are similar, but when they get to compose ideas, their interests are very boy-oriented. They want to do different things. They wouldn't get away with dancing princesses. The year we did Mother Earth, Come Dance With Me, we had dances about dancing in heaven before we were born, we had dances about desert, about water. We had sixty mothers come and perform in the show. But guess what the boys did? They did natural disasters. You can see what motivates them is different. It was cute when I told the girls they wanted to do natural disasters, one ten-year-old said that would be easy, they'd just have to stand there.

The girls love the boys and the boys love the girls, but they are able to develop in a safe place in those ideas. They work at jumping and freezing in a higher intensity than the girls do. We have some boys when they get to be fourteen or fifteen—Robert Philbrook is an example: both of his sons and all of his daughters went through our program. His oldest son wanted a little more technique, so he would come to the girls' class when he was a teenager. I taught him and he was able to come twice a week. That is an option if they are interested in pursuing at a higher level.

Of the difference now in the program, one is the size. It is a wieldy beast to manage. Also, confirming the space and having that taken care of. In order to balance the red when I first got in as director, we really had to budget to do a new show every year. We had music and costumes we had to pull from to try and keep the costs down for the students. We have been hit this year, even though none of my faculty are benefited faculty because of the new healthcare reform and some of the things that are coming into place. We had to raise tuition for the first time by \$40. We crept up by \$5 a year because we have to be able to make the healthcare costs across the university. Not that our faculty are receiving the benefits, except for the people administrating the programs, not including myself.

I understand under new university policy, under the Obama plan, 30 hours is going to come into play and that won't affect me even though I've been at a 75 or 80 percent load for the last 25 years, but that is going to make our costs go up. As I understand it, they are going to do it in 2011 even before the 2014 date. We are under a real pinch because we set our budget for the year and now we are going to have increasing administrating costs to cover the overhead for full-time employees that work to support us at conferences and workshops. I don't know if we are going to be able to raise tuition by another \$50 next year.

The students do need to pay up front because we have to rent and secure the space. For a two days a

week class, it is \$600, which is great for a whole year, but you have to cough up \$600 right up front. A lot of the parents are working to save ahead to make that happen, but with a \$50 increase, it wouldn't be \$5 a month, it would be \$650 then for the next year, for three hours a week. If you crunch the numbers, it is still the best numbers in Utah County but it is going to be hard to be solvent.

It's actually a business and it has to pay for itself. And we do. We have been in the black. We have been able to have surplus scholarships in the other programs and we have met those needs but we always want to come out in black. You don't want to cut it so close that it is in the red. One more thing I failed to mention which I think is so important: the program really can only flourish under the umbrella of BYU. If we were out in the private sector, we wouldn't be able to keep our educational philosophy: that ability to nurture children in appropriate developmental ways, because we would be open to whims and fashions that exist in the private sector.

Really, the biggest attribute that I can say has built the program to what it is, is because of the support of BYU. We have been allowed to flourish with those educational objectives under this great umbrella, which is the learning environment here at BYU that values and protects children and allows us to be educationally minded. It protects much better than it does in the private sector.